

Miracles happen at Sandrigham: Norfolk Trials

Almost three months later, I am finally here to write down what happened. On Sept 7th 2017, in fact, Briony won Novice Stake on Partridge at Sandrigham, organized by the Pointer Club of UK. Some might argue that, well, it's "just" a Novice Stake, but for me it is a great achievement. Briony is not my first English Setter, I got the first one, "Socks" (Slai di Riccagioia), in 1999, but he was a rescue and he came to me after having be discarded by a "pro" trainer and with a bag full of behavioural problems. In his own way, he was a smart dog, we managed to go hunting alone together (he did not want men with shotguns around him), but there was no way I could rehab completely and train him for trials. I had not enough skills, nor experience, and he would not have dealt well with formal training sessions. He, however, opened me new doors as we started training for rough shooting and I got a firearms and hunting license. I met people, got new friends and spent many years rough shooting over English Setters and other pointing breeds up and down the hills of the Northern Apennines. I, somehow, had the chance to watch- and shoot over- hundreds of dogs during those years, and it was an incredible experience. I also began attending trials and to work for canine and shooting magazines which lead me to meet breeders, judges and handlers...



Socks (Slai di Riccagioia)
my first ES

After his death, when I started looking for another setter, I had very clear ideas about what I wanted in my next dog, but not so clear ideas about where to find her! It took months, but I finally located my litter and my puppy, on a farm on the Swiss Alps, not too far from Sankt Moritz (posh dog!). I knew what I needed to know about Briony's dad, but mum was quite a surprise: she was beautiful, gentle and smart. She came with us heeling off lead to the small village's café and then sat quietly under the table. I loved that, as well the whole bloodline registered in the pedigree and the parents' health clearances. When I brought Briony home, people thought she was cute, but too expensive, and that I was going to "ruin" her, training her in my own way and socializing her too much. I just thought she was a terrible pup who did not like me at all. It took quite a while to become friends, probably she was just testing me to be sure she was in good hands!



Ansa del Simano, Briony's

mum



First day of 2017 hunting season

She was naughty, but smart, and she quickly developed in a good hunting companion. Sometimes she had a mind of her own and sometimes she was not the easiest dog to handle, but she surely did not lack of determination and bird sense. She was, and she still is, strong willed and sensitive at the same time. Thanks to friends, we had access to some private estates where she could meet much more birds that she could have met on more affordable – by me – public grounds. Other people introduced her to woodcock and, I still remember the day, with my surprise, she pointed her first snipe. During these hunting seasons, she learnt to work with other dogs and we worked a lot on backing and on remaining steady on point. I must admit I had good teachers, and that skilled hunters helped us to locate birds, but steadiness to wing was not required. Hunters here want the dogs to be steady on point, but after the bird flies, all they wish is to hit it, none cares anymore about the dog.

In the meantime, as she also grew prettier, I entered her at a dog show that took place nearby and, to my surprise, she was awarded a RCAC (RCC), so I decided to continue on this road. Briony, however, had other plans and after a stressful indoor show, she decided she wanted to end her career as a show dog. She had already a CAC in her pockets and I did not want her journey to end. I am not a show person, and I consider dog

shows boring, but I wanted to prove that a good looking working dog, from working (mountain hunting and mountain trials) bloodlines, could make it. So, we went together to take handling lessons with [Richard Hellman](#), a great handler and a great person. Briony seemed to enjoy the lessons and, in August 2015, she became a Show (full) Champion. I also think that having learnt to face the ring she somehow increased her self esteem.



Briony first dog show... RCAC

Field trials were next on my list, but there was a HUGE problem: I did not want to send her away for training, nor to hire a professional trainer as people normally do here. I wanted to train and handle Briony by myself, easier said than done in Italy where field trials are dominated by male professional handlers. But, thanks to an unexpected series of coincidences, in the summer of 2015 I ended up watching the Champion Stake for Pointers and Setters in Northern England and... [I had an awakening!](#) I saw some “ordinary people” handling their dogs to a very high standard and I saw very obedient setters! I was used to see very obedient Drahthaars (GWPs), but the average Italian Setter is usually quite a wild critter! I could not believe setters could be that obedient and, as naïve as it might sound, I was impressed.



Dorback Estate, Scotland,
training with gamekeeper
Brian

Briony herself was pretty wild at the time and her nickname was “Tigress” but, again, unexpectedly, a good mentor came to us. You can read more about Briony’s taming for field trials and about “White Feather” [clicking here](#) but, in a few words, I would describe her [training](#) a demanding task, it was equally rewarding though! It took a while to tame “Tigress”, but as soon as she decided to cooperate, she became impressively reliable and well behaved. This is how we ended up on the moor in the summer of 2016, and this is how my passion for British trials developed even further ([you can read more here](#)). [Our first experience with grouse](#) was not that bad: she always behaved and she kept improving but paid her inexperience with grouse during the English Trials and she paid my inexperience with trials in during the [Scottish – and the English- trials](#). She still needed some fine tunings but, overall, I could not complain. At the end of the circuit, I went home with no awards but determined to save money and to go back in 2017.



Haughton Hall, roading a hare :-)

But, when the time to go again on the moors was close to come, I had to withdraw all my entries as Briony anticipated her season. I wasn't happy, I was quite disappointed, no... honestly... I was quite upset, but there was not much else I could do. Some friends, however, tried to cheer me up advertising September trials on partridge. It is easier to get a run, they said, the atmosphere is very relaxed, they added and... we are going to run at Sandrigham Estate, on Queen Elizabeth II's grounds, they concluded. I must admit the last thing they mentioned was very tempting: it was thanks to such a good advertisement that I decided to bet on partridge trials in Norfolk. That was a brave bet, I shall admit, as I was perfectly aware they were going to be more difficult than grouse trials. While gathering information, I learn that: 1) during the first round, usually on stubble, dogs were going to be evaluated mainly for pace, style and ground treatment and that 2) "a few" hares were going to be present. Uh, I was forgetting the sugar beet! So well, while I was going to do my best to show up with a well behaved dog, going there to win was not surely written down in my agenda. I just wanted to be there, see people, get to know things better, learn more and feel part of a world I like.

Briony started the circuit well (we went to the 2nd round in 4 trials out of 9) and, even if, we could not find any birds on our paths, she was behaving well and respecting hare nicely (I do not have hare here, just rabbits and cats to train on). I was happy, we were learning more and enjoying the social side of September trials : I do not drink, but I was always at the pub! It was nice to see friends doing well and, especially after IGL Snettisham trials , when no awards were given, I was super happy to see Rhia (Tapper) and Sara (Chichester) receiving the Gun's Choice rosette. Trials proved to be as difficult as I expected: while there were plenty of hare,

feathered wildlife was scarce or, should I say, very smart and very professional at hiding. On Thursday, 7th of September, (Pointer Club trial at Sandrigham) I was number 13 AND the bye dog (quite a scary combination), but she did well in the first round, and well again in the second, so I knew I was going to get “something”, but I did not know what.

When the secretary announced that I had won First Prize, I could not believe it and indeed, the Vaux Silver Tankard, fell from my hands a couple of times! It was like living in a Disney movie and this article should have explained you why. She is the first dog I have ever trained for trials, and I trained her all by myself. Yes, many wonderful people helped me through the journey (in Italy and in the UK, and I am grateful to them all), but I have always been the one in charge. I am just a normal person with limited training opportunities coupled with a high degree of stubbornness and self discipline which surely helped. This is why everything that could sound normal to someone else, is so special to me, and yes, winning an award at Sandrigham confirms that Briony is a posh dog!



Me, Alan Goodship (Queen Elizabeth's dog trainer) and the fallen trophy

Ps. I promise I will also write on other dogs – and not just on mine – as there will be more articles on September trials, (all [partridge trials](#) results can be downloaded here) in the

meantime, if you have a chance, take a look at the [research project](#) I am working on for my Veterinary Medicine dissertation.

Still curious about British trials? Check the section A Month on the Moor or [click here](#).

Lady Jean Fforde of Isle of Arran Kennels – An Appreciation by Jon Kean

Herewith a tribute to Lady Jean Fforde who has passed away on 13th October 2017, 3 weeks before her 97th birthday by Jon Kean

I first met Lady Jean in the 1970s – appropriately enough it was on the grouse moors in Perthshire. Janette and I were there just to spectate at the field trial and find out more about working Pointers and Setters. Lady Jean immediately put us at ease and explained what was happening at the trial. My one abiding memory from that day was the unusual footwear Lady Jean sported. It was a pair of sandals (baseball type) with the words “Skateboard City” emblazoned on the side. Her great friend Mrs Patience Badenoch Nicolson was there too. Their guidance inspired me to find out more about working Pointers.

From that day, friendship developed and I learned so much from Lady Jean and Patience about working Pointers. After a while, I asked Lady Jean if it would be possible to purchase an Isle of Arran Pointer. My wish was granted! In historical terms, the Pointer kennels were among the first, if not the first, to be registered by her grandfather at the Kennel Club when it

was formed. In 1983, I brought back from Arran two male puppies from Lady Jean's litter, sired by Moanruad Aron (the late John Nash's Pointer) and Isle of Arran Neillia (litter sister of the 1981 Champion Stake winner FT CH Isle of Arran Larch, handled by Mrs Marcia Clark). I reared Isle of Arran Micha and the brother Isle of Arran Gideon was bought by Duncan Davis from the North of England. The rest, as they say, is history. Gideon duly became a field trial Champion and Micha (pet name Duke) won the Champion Stake at Bollihope Moor in County Durham in 1989. Duke was a fantastic Pointer for our shooting trips to Garrogie Estate, owned by Charles Connell in Invernesshire. Apart from his game finding ability, Duke's great attribute was his stamina and endurance. He had the strength of 3 dogs.



Lady Jean Fforde and Jon Kean – Champion Stake 1989

Lady Jean and Patience were hugely influential people in the Pointer world. They were always willing to help and offer advice to anyone interested in working gundogs. One day, I was called aside for an informal chat. Lady Jean told me: "Patience and I both agree that you need to put something back into the sport. We think you should take on the role of Honorary Secretary of the Scottish Field Trials Association." I was duly appointed in 1986 and have done the job of Secretary for the Pointers and Setters ever since.

Looking back, there were many famous Pointers with the Isle of

Arran prefix. The list is endless – Isle of Arran African Queen, Scotney Isle of Arran Regent, Isle of Arran Juno, FT CH Scotney Isle of Arran Jack, Isle of Arran Minoru, FT CH Isle of Arran Dice, Isle of Arran Lilly. Lady Jean's favourite was FT CH Isle of Arran June, a beautiful orange and white bitch. In Lady Jean's memoir, she wrote: *"June became the dog of my life – I adored her! Considering she was the first dog of any kind I had trained myself, she was a miracle. I trained her by phoning Patience Nicolson week by week, and asking for instructions."*

Lady Jean was President of the Pointer Club of Scotland since it was founded many years ago. She had many, many interests outwith the world of field trials. She was a keen gardener, for example. Her parents brought back many rare plants from their trips throughout the world. On our visits to Strabane, her home at Brodick, Lady Jean gave us a guided tour of the gardens. On one visit, Lady Jean told us she would be sending her friend to collect us from the ferry at Brodick. The friend just happened to be Richard Todd, the Oscar-nominated actor best known for war dramas like *The Hasty Heart*, *The Dam Busters* and *The Longest Day*.

She was also involved with the RNLI and the Red Cross. She was an artist. Lady Jean wrote fascinating memoirs – *Castles in the Air* and *Feet On the Ground – From Castles to Catastrophe*. In those books, we discover she spent part of her life in India, Palestine, Sierra Leone, Northern Rhodesia and of course her beloved Isle of Arran. It was at the Government Code and Cypher School at Bletchley Park that Lady Jean joined the army of women who cracked the German code to save countless lives and shorten the war by at least two years.

Lady Jean's mother was very keen on taking cine films of life on Arran, which included stalking and shooting over Pointers on the island from the 1930s onwards. A couple of years ago we spent a lovely afternoon in Strabane viewing some of the reels of film, and they are fascinating to watch.

Lady Jean sent me a gift of the book called Training Setters and Pointers for Field Trials, by Professor John Beazley, Alf Manners and Arnold White-Robinson. It is signed : *"To Jon. Wishing You every luck in field trials with your puppy. Jean Fforde 1981."* I have used this book as a guide for seminars ever since.

In 1982, Lady Jean asked me to show her Champion Stake winner, Larch, at Crufts in London. This I duly did and was thrilled when the Judge Mrs Kitty Edmondson awarded a prize to Larch. Unbeknown to me, Lady Jean's best friend , Princess Antoinette of Monaco, was a surprise visitor at the ringside at Crufts.

I will always have great memories of Lady Jean. Our last visit to Lady Jean was in July this year. She was in good spirits and very keen to hear news from the world of Pointers. RIP Lady Jean.

Still curious about British trials? Check the section A Month on the Moor or [click here](#).

Una gemma dal 1956: un italiano ai trials inglesi

Come alcuni di voi già sanno, ho ereditato l'archivio del Dr. Ridella, veterinario e allevatore di setter con l'affisso Ticinensis. Mi sento onorata di essere stata scelta come custode di questi materiali, ma mi rincresce ammettere che ne ho ripulito e ordinato solo metà delle riviste. Tuttavia, circa 50 anni di editoria cino-venatoria, sono oggi ben archiviati e leggibili. Sapendo ciò, un amico mi ha chiesto di trovargli due articoli di Solaro del 1938 e del 1954 che, ovviamente, non sono riuscita ad individuare. Non dandomi per

vinta, ho controllato anche gli anni limitrofi, niente da fare, ma ho trovato qualcosa di estremamente affascinante ed inatteso. Nel numero del secondo trimestre di Rassegna Cinofila (è l'antenato dei Nostri Cani) del 1956, c'è un bell'articolo di Giulio Colombo (1886-1966). Per chi non lo conoscesse, Colombo era allevatore con affisso della Baita, nonché un noto giudice. Aveva sempre cercato di tenere vivi i legami tra Italia e Gran Bretagna e l'Italia importando, tra gli altri i setter: **Lingfield Mystic** (vincitore del Derby inglese); **Lingfield Ila**, **Lingfield Puma** e **Bratton Vanity**.



Grazie all'articolo, ho scoperto che nel 1956, Colombo è andato a giudicare a **Sutton Scotney** (Hampshire – UK) e ha raccontato la esperienza. L'articolo è leggibile per intero nel [PDF che potete scaricare qui](#) o nella photogallery [qui linkata](#). Ne riporterò però qui alcuni pezzi salienti.

Colombo comincia pensando a Laverack, Llewellyn e Lady Auckland (che giudicava con lui) e con un excursus storico che spiega come mai setter e pointer siano stati selezionati in questa maniera. *“Credo aver, inteso i due Grandi sussurrare a un dipresso così: Competizioni di giganti le nostre, quando ancora si credeva alla necessità del cane da ferma sul terreno della caccia, quando pointers e setters rispondevano al gusti venatori del cacciatore, quando non si codificava un bel niente a priori, teoricamente, per estetismi o postulati da tavolino senza aver vissuta o sofferta mai la, passione incontenibile dello sport codaio, fra le più strenue ed inebrianti passioni, quando pointers e setters, cani da Grande Cerca, si imposero selezionati perfezionati, secondo suggeriva la pratica diuturna di lunghe stagioni venatorie con*

l'esperienza del terreno e dei selvatico, a servizio del fucile vagante, e si stabilì la macchina animale perfetta, collaudata con formula aderente alla realtà per quel terreno e quel selvatico, e conquistò il mondo intero quella macchina intelligente, tanto che nati Inghilterra pointers e setters furon poi cittadini di ogni Paese."

Non credo ci sia molto da aggiungere, poi continua con la descrizione dettagliata del lavoro che essi sono chiamati a fare: *"II cacciatore ragionò così: di fronte a me la pianura sconfinata, ondeggiante di mammelloni di grani, di stoppie, di prati, di eriche, faticosa, lenta da per correre tutta scarpinando da coltivo a coltivo, da spiaggia a spiaggia in traccia delle compagnie di starne e grouses discoste le une dalle altre in famiglia ciascuna col proprio pascolo, e le lunghe pause senza incontri e senza sparare scoraggiano anche il cacciatore più caparbio: a me occorre un ausiliare speciale anzi una pariglia di tali, dall'olfatto possente, cerca indefessa. dalla ferma statica, dalla guidata corta, che a galoppo spinto per accorciare le distanze, nel tempo breve per la nostra passione da crepuscolo a crepuscolo, risparmiando a me ciechi e fortunosi passi, concludano spicci su grouses e su starne e magari su lepre sorniona; e perché io possa sparare a visuale libera senza tema, giù, a terra proni a frullo e schizzo. Drake e Dash, ed è il più bel momento della vita di cacciatore; e perché quel selvatico che non possono raggiungere né se vola né se galoppa, non induca in tentazione, proni testa fra gli arti ari in segno di rinuncia, voi cavalieri dei moors e praterie, per riporto e recupero i ho apparecchiato io stesso un valletto che non falla. il retriever, vi risparmi di strusciare il tartufo pistando, voi Signori », Torto o ragione, ragionavano così e così fu sempre categoricamente a quei tempi. Proscritti falsi allarmi di ferme senza presenza di selvatico, non si tolleravano inganni ed indugi oziosi, se Drake e Dash fermano ci sta il selvatico e non lo mollano più, e si raziocinava così: « Perchè noi si possa usufruire del lavoro di due cani, ed uno non costituisca*

il doppione dell'altro galoppandogli al fianco appaiato, li sguinzaglio nel bel mezzo dell'area da esplorare e partano essi uno verso destra e l'altro verso sinistra in senso opposto, e giunti a un centinaio di metri, anche di più a seconda del terreno vasto e sgombro, virino essi e ritornino in direzione l'uno dell'altro, sempre nella scia dei vento, ma più oltre verso la meta lontana, in maniera da esplorare il terreno anche nel senso della direttiva di marcia, e si incontrino a metà cammino scambiandosi il lato come nella quadriglia dama e cavaliere, a ritmo cadenzato, con astuta sincronia e... nacque la cerca incrociata, non eleganza, ma accorgimento pratico.



E affinché l'intesa fra i due ausiliari fosse concorde, con rispetto della fatica e della autorità di ciascuno e l'uno approfittasse dei risultati concreti dell'altro, ecco che mentre l'uno dei cani bloccava col rito della ferma l'altro non persisteva ad esplorare, ma sostava immobile simulando a sua volta la ferma per mimetismo conscio e istintivo, per collaborazione atavica fra gli animali ida preda, e il segugio accorre scagnando all'indicazione sonora e Drake rispetta la ferma non sua ed ecco codificata la pratica del consenso, indispensabile con ausiliari che trespino veloci e lontani.

E siccome il selvatico tiene udito sensibilissimo, abolito ogni richiamo a voce o col fischio, cenni della mano al cane che di tanto in tanto sbircia al padrone per interpretarne le

*intenzioni, quindi tacita intesa fra cacciatore ed ausiliare, l'uno per l'altro. E quando s'ha da interrompere l'azione, un sibilo e i cani al terra, docili al guinzaglio e si inauguro il **drop** e il **down**, non accademia da recinto, ma freno in terreno libero. Col tempo per emulazione fra scuderie, per sane rivalità sportive fra amatori di razze affini a chi tiene il miglior cane con olfatto più potente a corsa più veloce e reazioni più pronte, nacque in un paese di scommesse, il cane da gara, il Trialler, via col vento, cane da Sport, ma riproduttore che rifornisca i ranghi per cacciare starne e grouses e non lepri e conigli, in terreno vasto e non negli scampoli di grano."*

Qui viene espresso in dettaglio il lavoro "ideale" dei cani inglesi e le motivazioni pratiche che stanno dietro a queste pretese. Leggendo questi paragrafi sento ancora più la mancanza delle mie esperienze britanniche, perché da loro le cose sono rimaste all'incirca come descritte qui. Se non avessi prima visto, e poi partecipato ai loro trials, sarei un cinofilo diverso, avrei un cane diverso ma... devo ammettere che sono contenta di quello che sono! Segue qualche notizia sulle regole del gioco, con riflessioni sui pro e sui contro delle diverse regole: *"In Inghilterra non si redige relazione alcuna, non si concede qualifica, si comunica l'ordine di classifica dal primo al quarto con una riserva, e stop, i concorrenti tanto intelligenti da valutare da sé gli errori dei propri allievi senza sentirseli ricordare per iscritto postumo dal Giudice e talmente sportivi da comprendere che se il Giudice ha creduto di disporre i cani in un dato ordine progressivo è ozioso recriminare e voler sostituire tante altre classifiche quanti concorrenti e spettatori, ognuna diversa dall'altra, ma tutte quante più oculate, più cognite, più probanti, più sapute, più pettegole di quella ufficiale!"*

Non ci sta minuto di tolleranza, assurda nostrana indulgenza che consente al cane di dimostrare le proprie attitudini a far frullare, a rifiutare il consenso, a rincorrere, a beffare il

conduttore, senza che il Giudice possa prenderne atto, coll'eventualità magari di non aver mai più durante il turno il cane occasione di ripetere quanto é suo costume perpetrare di norma, e frodare magari un premio con relativa qualifica bugiarda.

Nemmeno si tiene conto di un lasso di tempo prestabilito per la prova: allorché il Giudice opina di essersi fatto un concetto probante del lavoro dei cani taglia corto, e su questo si potrebbe discutere, perché un minimo di percorso è più equo a garanzia delle probabilità comuni, eccetto per gli errori da squalifica. Vige il sistema dei richiami protratti con confronti ripetuti, con pericolo di dover sul finire della gara modificare da capo una classifica già plausibile"

Se volete saperne di più sulle differenze tra le prove italiane e quelle britanniche, potete andare a [leggerle qui](#). Faccio una breve riflessione sull'abitudine inglese di non avere relazioni a fine prova: Colombo dice che il pubblico spesso tende a saperne di più del giudice. Persone che, pur stando a centinaia di metri dal cane, vedono e prevedono errori che sfuggono (secondo loro) ai giudici! Credevo che negli anni '50 il pubblico fosse più , come dire, sobrio ma apparentemente l'arte di attribuire errori inesistenti ai cani degli altri ha radici antiche. Colombo poi racconta del **Derby** (non so se fosse identico all'attuale Puppy Derby, per soggetti sotto ai 2 anni) e non ho capito se i cani correvano a singolo o in coppia, siccome menziona poi le Brace Stakes (in coppia). "Nel complesso del lavoro nel **Derby** constatai qualche fase di dettaglio, insistenze su orme, qualche consenso stentato a comando, senza partecipazione né formale né conscia all'azione; Nota del Concorso presente in alcuni esemplari, ma frenata da frequenti incontri di fagiano, lepri e conigli, scarse le starne, e deplorabile il coniglio soprattutto, che conta é la starna, per fagiani basta il cocker. Punte in profondità. ritorni all'interno come in Coppa Europa, qualche intemperanza di richiami come da noi. Soggetti

a corto di preparazione per il maltempo, alcuni veramente di classe, ma non superiore nel complesso alla nostra attuale. Primo **Lenwade Wizard**, pointer di Mr. Arthur Rank, di 15 mesi, stilista, corretto, galoppo sciolto, risolutivo sull'incontro. Secondo **Lenwade Whisper**, pointer di Messrs P. P. Wayre's e G. F. Jolly's, di 15 mesi, con buon percorso, benché lacets troppo compatti e qualche incertezza nell'indicazione."

Seguono accenni alla Brace Stake: "Le **Brace Stakes** videro presenti due Setters, irlandesi, **Sulhamstead Bey d'Or** e **F. T. Sulhamstead Basil d'Or**. Basil soggetto rimarchevole, con reazioni pronte e buon olfatto, impegno e buon galoppo, qualche incertezza e ritorni all'interno, ferma e guida con espressione, consente, bene in mano, ben condotto, surclassa il compagno Bey e si aggiudica per proprio esclusivo merito il secondo premio, trattenuto il primo, della pariglia."

Alla **All Aged Stake** era stato iscritto anche un weimaraner che poi non si è presentato. Colombo disquisisce sul far correre un continentale insieme a degli inglesi: "non avendo visto il Weimaraner sul lavoro non posso affermare se fosse o no nera Nota del Concorso dl Setters e Pointers, superflua qualsiasi meraviglia dal momento che corrono da noi diversi Kurzhaar ed Epagneuls perfettamente nella Nota della Grande Cerca assai più di qualche esponente di razza inglese; gli inglesi, con meno ipocrisia e più raziocinio, dal momento che alcuni continentali filano all'inglese, li fanno correre con gli inglesi; la Grande Cerca non è questione di coda lunga o corta, ma di garretti, olfatto reagendo, e non è escluso che un giorno i Continentali, italiani compresi, corrano a Grande Cerca, e pointers e setters a Cerca ristretta."

Dopodiché tira le somme su quanto visto nel corso delle prove: "in Inghilterra la Grande Cerca non è più professata e sentita come un tempo, in un ambiente dove il cane da ferma è in crisi gravissima di impiego eccetto che alcuni pochi attivissimi Sportsmen fedeli alla formula antica; che è la prassi impiegata per correre la Grande Cerca che si allontana oggi in

Inghilterra, o quantomeno a Sutton Scotney, non dal modello continentale ma da quello stesso descritto e commentato dagli Autori inglesi, praticato per il passato e introdotto poi sul continente: turni a singhiozzo, interruzioni di percorso per battere porzioni limitate, della pur vasta area, sfruttamento di appezzamenti, di scampoli di terreno percorribili in qualche minuto, assolutamente inadonei allo sviluppo della cerca in grande e anzi in contrasto con la cerca dinamica e veloce pertanto che nota personalità inglese ebbe a definire alcuni: turni da Springers; si tollerano dai conduttori troppe fasi di dettaglio e si ammettono lunghe guidate inespressive con schizzo finale di lepre e coniglio considerate valide, e niente sta ad attestare la possibilità di pistaggio che il Trialler naso al vento deve trascurare non essendo suo compito preoccuparsene; si dimentica spesso che il consenso è attivo, partecipante, solidale con il cane in ferma e non rinunciatario e passivo per obbedienza; non si reprimono sempre i ritorni all'interno e si tarpa talora l'azione del cane di lato costringendolo a percorso inadeguato allo scopo stesso della velocità."



Il cane da ferma era in decadenza in Gran Bretagna nel 1956? Non lo so, non c'ero, quello che posso intuire da letture passate ed esperienze presenti è che la realtà venatoria britannica era (ed è) completamente diversa dalla nostra [come potete leggere cliccando qui](#). La loro gestione faunistica-venatoria ha indubbiamente favorito spaniels e retrievers, a scapito dei cani da ferma. Probabilmente, nel 1956, i cani da

ferma erano comunque cani di nicchia e in stagnazione, mentre da noi si assisteva ad una sorta di ascesa della caccia con il cane da ferma, gli inglesi in particolare. Innanzitutto la Grande Cerca intesa da Colombo nel 1956 era molto diversa dalla Grande Cerca attuale ma... gli inglesi hanno mai avuto una vera e propria Grande Cerca? Non ricordo nulla di specifico ad opera di autori inglesi. Non dico che non sia mai stata descritta, dico che non ne ho mai letto e mi piacerebbe leggerne su uno dei testi a cui fa riferimento Colombo, senza però indicarne i nomi. Mi piacerebbe poter conversare con lui e capire, capire cosa intendessero gli inglesi – secondo lui – per Grande Cerca e capire la sua visione. La sua visione, in fondo la conosciamo, non possiamo certo dimenticare che il cane ideale per Colombo era velocissimo, dalla cerca estrema, dal naso superlativo. Lo chiamava *“il puro”*, il *“folle”* e in **“Trialer! Saggio di Cinofilia Venatoria” (1950)** lo definiva: ***“Il Riproduttore, Il Capolavoro, il quadro d’Autore, il brillante di cinquanta grani, l’oro zecchino. E’ il Capodanno, non gli altri 364 giorni.”*** La cinofilia italiana è stata profondamente influenzata dalla visione di Colombo, ma non quella britannica e, come dicevo sopra, non sono nemmeno certa che inizialmente fosse indirizzata in quella direzione. [In ogni caso mi sono rimessa a leggere Arkwright a piccoli passi].

Turni da spaniel. Interruzioni di percorsi, terreni questionabili, lunghe fasi di dettaglio, lunghe guidate eccetera, le ho viste? Ni. Ho seguito e partecipato ad almeno 20 trials, forse di più, e ho visto alcune delle cose di cui racconta Colombo ma andava sempre così. Molto andava a discrezione dei giudici e dei guardiacaccia (è il guardiacaccia che ti dice dove puoi fare il turno!) e il livello dei cani era variegato. Non so come fosse la situazione a Sutton Stockney ma, in certi trials a grouse si corrono in mezzo a densità di selvatici impressionanti. Non è che si possano fare chissà quali percorsi. I consensi a comando? Li chiedono ancora anche se un consenso naturale è

molto apprezzato e si sta lavorando in questo senso. Tirando le somme, comunque, credo che Giulio Colombo si aspettasse di assistere a qualcosa di diverso e sia rimasto un po' spiazzato. Ciò nonostante, Colombo non era uno stupido e ammette egli stesso che anche un giudice britannico potrebbe non essere colpito sempre in positivo dai trials italiani: *"Benchè una sola prova controllata da me non possa fornirmi indice probante del complesso di un materiale setter e pointer, esiguo come numero nei confronti dell'italiano e francese, da quella sola gara di Sutton Scotney (dovrei dedurne una netta decadenza rispetto alla nostra; mi guardo dal farlo: probabilmente un Giudice inglese avrebbe la stessa impressione da alcuni turni nostrani alla Cattanea, a Borgo d'Ale ed Alice Castello."*

Il nostro inviato ammette altresì di aver visto, oltre a cani meno buoni, anche cani buoni: *"Se alcuni concorrenti si palesarono tassativamente negativi al compito del Trialler, altri al limite quattro pointers almeno, due setters inglesi e un irlandese furono in tal classe da doverli rammaricare dal non poterli rivedere mai più. Fra i premiati **Seguntium Niblick**, pointer di Mr. J. Alun Roberts, di due anni, primo, velocissimo, sicuro sull'incontro, senso del selvatico. **Scotney Gary**, pointer di Mr. Arthur Rank, due anni, velocissimo, stilista, senso del selvatico, olfatto, secondo; **Scotney Solitaire**, pointer di Mr. Arthur Rank, di non ancora due anni, tutto nella Nota, testa alta, corretto, olfatto, reazioni, terzo; **Sulhamstead Basil d'Or**, irlandese, impegno, testa alta, corretto, quarto; **Ch. Downsmans Bracken**, setter inglese, dalle reazioni rapide, le ferme schiacciate slittando, lunghe e significative, infortunato su starne durante un rispetto di lepre, quinto. E lo indiavolato **Sulhamstead Nina d'Or**, setter irlandese di Mrs. Nagle's e Miss M. Clarcks's, di non ancora l'anno, partito su lepre, e quello inglesino blu belton dalla cerca ampia, avida, **Flashaway Eve**, del Col. A. S. Dalding's, di non ancora due anni, che tende al fuori mano sul fianco, ma possiede tanta avidità e stile*

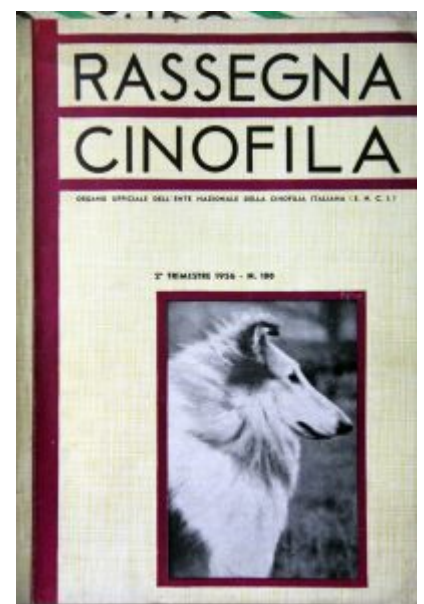
setter e galoppo radente da presagire un Campione, se ben condotto.” Condivido appieno, la mia esperienza è identica alla sua: accanto a cani poco stilisti e lenti, ci sono soggetti che non sfigurerebbero anche alle nostre prove: in 60 anni è cambiato poco.



L'articolo di Colombo si chiude così: “Ma da Oltre Manica si importarono pointers e setters eccelsi, ma oltre Manica vige ancora sangue di **Dero 4° del Trasimeno** di Vignoli, sangue ricordato, vantato, e scorre nelle vene del secondo classificato, **Scotney Gary**, sangue che emigrò anche in America per ritornare in Inghilterra; e **Blakfield Gide** di Waldemar Marr, sorellastra di **Fast**, e **Galf di S. Patrick** di Nasturzio, sono citati in Inghilterra, paese per niente sciovinista, fra i migliori e più validi riproduttori, ed esponenti dei Pointer in quegli allevamenti: ricordiamolo anche noi.

Da “Rassegna “ ringrazio **Mr. e Mrs Bank, Lady Auckland**, il Segretario Generale del Kennel Club Inglese **Mr. Buckley, Mr. Binney, Mr. e Mrs. Mac Donald Daly, Mr. e Mrs. William Wiley, Mr. Lovel Clifford** mio valido interprete, che mi furon prodighi di ospitalità ed attenzioni durante il breve, ma denso soggiorno in- Inghilterra. Formulo il voto che la passione del Trialler non venga mai meno nella Patria Augusta del Signore l’Aria!” [Chi volesse leggerlo per intero [può scaricarlo qui](#)].

Ho deciso di parlare di questo articolo perché ritengo contenga dei punti chiave utili anche al lettore contemporaneo. Quali sono? Mi piace innanzitutto che apra con un excursus storico che spiega come si siano evolute le razze da ferma inglesi. Sono il frutto di particolari selvatici e di particolari terreni. Sono il frutto della caccia in quelle circostanze, circostanze che ne hanno plasmato il temperamento e codificato il metodo di lavoro. Prima che esistessero le prove, esisteva la caccia, esisteva il cacciatore che, a fronte di situazioni di caccia complesse, volevano tornare a casa con qualcosa nella cacciatora. Le circostanze hanno subito reso chiari quali fossero i tratti da selezionare e i comportamenti graditi, nonché tutto ciò che doveva essere considerato difetto. I cani andavano a caccia e poi, se bravi, venivano presentati anche alle prove. Un tempo era così anche in Italia e... vorrei fosse rimasto tale. Oggi abbiamo Campioni di Lavoro che non sono mai stati a caccia, che sono di proprietà (o persino condotti ed addestrati) da gente che non pratica attivamente la caccia con il cane da ferma, o che la pratica in contesti e su selvatici che si discostano da condizioni ideali e probanti. Questo porta anche a non comprendere alcuni regolamenti nati tanti anni fa, e a fare confusione su quali siano i comportamenti corretti da parte del cane, eppure costoro spesso si ritengono "esperti". Se rileggete le parole di Colombo vedrete quanto stima il fermo al frullo, il **down** e il **drop**, definendoli **"non accademia da recinto, ma freno in terreno libero"**, beh nella nostra penisola sono ancora abbastanza fraintesi. Non so se Colombo sia stato anche a trials su grouse ma la sottoscritta ha impiegato pochi minuti sul moor a capire che lì, questi insegnamenti sono indispensabili. Colombo ricorda anche l'importanza del percorso, del saper stare sul vento e del lavoro in coppia. Lavoro in coppia che deve essere armonico, di squadra facendo capo a



caratteristiche che devono essere nella genetica del cane. I cani devono anche essere facili da condurre, collegati e disponibili a collaborare con la minima necessità di ordini sonori, o i selvatici sarebbero disturbati troppo. Questi appunti mancano in tanti libri di cinofilia venatoria moderna, hanno forse questi tratti perso importanza?

Credo ora abbiate capito perché io ritenga il resoconto di Colombo su Sutton Scotney affascinante ed intrigante. Poi si aggiunge qualcosa di personale: proprio come lui, ho avuto modo di assistere (e prendere parte) ai British Trial e [essi significano molto per me](#). Mi hanno trasformato in un cinofilo “diverso” e mi hanno consentito di avere un cane “diverso”.

[Per saperne di più sulla cinofilia britannica cliccate qui.](#)

A Gem from 1956: an Italian at British Trials

As some of you know, I inherited part of Dr. Ridella library and archive. Dr. Ridella was a veterinarian and an important English Setter breeder, his kennel name was Ticinensis. I feel really honoured to have been chosen as a custodian, but I hate to admit... I dusted and cleaned only half of the materials I have been given. Fifty years of canine magazines (1900-1950), however, are now readable and carefully stored. Knowing about this collection, a friend asked me to look for two peculiar articles written respectively in 1938 and in 1954. I could not find them but, while checking out nearby years, I found something absolutely unexpected, beautiful and fascinating. In the 1956 spring issue of the Rassegna Cinofila (the official name of the Italian Kennel Club Bulletin at the time), I found

me miss what I saw, experienced and learnt during my time in the UK. As I often say, my dog would be very different if I had not seen their trials, and I would also be a much different trainer and handler. But I really like what I am now!!!

He then informs the reader about the differences (rules) between Italian and British trials: in Britain there is no “minute” (here all mistakes made during the first minute are forgiven); there is no established running time (here is 15 minutes) and good dogs are asked to run a second (and maybe a third round). He also lists the pros and cons of these choices. [You can read more about the differences between Italian and UK trials in my older articles.](#) It is interesting



Julio Andreotti e Silvio Colombo a Reggio Emilia

that he points out that judges, in the UK, do not comment on the dog's work (on the contrary, they are expected to so here) and that explaining what the dog did, in public... often leads the public to believe they know more than the judges. This proved to be true in my limited experience, watchers (Italian and foreign), despite being several hundred metres away from the dog, see – and foresee – mistakes that handlers and judges, despite being right above the dog

“miss”! I thought, that people in the fifties were more considerate, but, apparently, the art of attributing inexistent faults to other handlers' dogs has a long standing tradition.

Colombo then describes what he saw during the “Derby”. I do not know if that Derby is like the current Puppy Derby (for dogs under 2 years, running in a brace) as I cannot understand whether the dogs were running alone or in a brace. He says he saw some back castings, some dogs who needed more training and some dogs who sniffed on the ground/detailed around the quarry

too much. Rabbits, hare and pheasant further complicated things. First prize went to **Lenwade Wizard**, Pointer dog owned by Mr. Arthur Rank, 15 months old described as stylish, good gallop, good at handling birds; second prize **Lenwade Whisper**, Pointer dog owned by Messrs P. P. Wayre's G. F. Jolly, aged 15 months. In the **Brace Stake** he noticed two Irish Setters **Sulhamstead Bey d'Or** and **F. T. Sulhamstead Basil d'Or** who eventually got second prize. As for the **All Aged stake** (which should be like the modern Open Stake), a Weimaraner was supposed to run with setters and pointers but was eventually withdrawn. Colombo was asked by Lady Hove to express his opinion: he seems to have had mixed feelings about what he saw. Let's not forget that he later writes that pointing dogs are no longer common and popular in the UK, that people prefer spaniels and retrievers and Setters and Pointers are decaying. How are things now? Spaniels and retrievers still outnumber pointing dogs and this sounds a bit weird to Italians, being the average Italian hunter/shooter the owner of a pointing dog, most of often of an English Setter. [But... the two realities are very different.](#)

He writes that the "search" in the UK is no longer how it should be, and how it used to be. He states that, previously, the British wanted the dogs to run wider and faster. He says that that was the "ancient" way of interpreting the Grande Cerca. Whereas I read both Laverack and Arkwright, I do not recall anything like that and I am not familiar with other British authors advocating this working style. Also, I have not witnessed the Setter & Pointer early

years, so I cannot say if what Colombo claims is true. I would like to remember, however, that Giulio Colombo, besides breeding and judging, in 1950 published the book “

Trialer! An Essay on Gundogs” on Setters and Pointers. The book became a bestseller, it is still a bestseller indeed, and deeply influenced Italian breeders,

judges and fanciers. Giulio Colombo ideal dog was a fast and furious super dog made of speed, deep castings and excellent nose. He called him “the pure”, “the fool”, then described him with these words: ***“The Trialer is the producer, the Masterpiece, the famous Artist’s painting, the fifty carats diamond, the pure gold”. He is New Year’s Day, not the remaining 364 days.”***



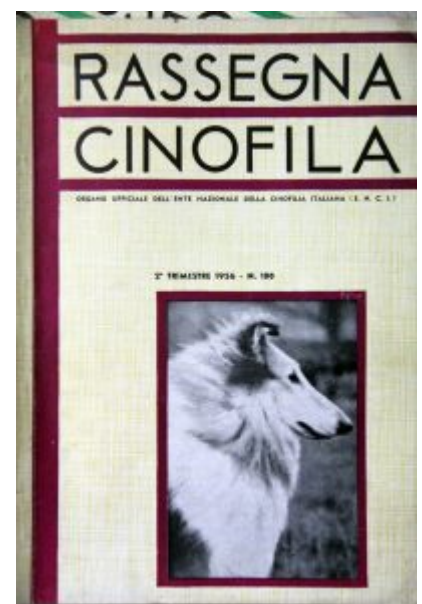
So, I really wonder whether any British authors had ever outlined such a dog, or whether Colombo just believed an hypothetical British author did or, again, whether he misunderstood some writings (he did not read English, as far as I know). So, basically, I think he was [expecting something different](#) and he did not entirely like what he saw. He complains about “interrupted” runs, short castings, slow runs, small parcels of ground to be explored, searches that gets “limited” by the judges and dogs forced to back on command. He writes that a British sportman defined some of the runs “*Springer Spaniel work*”. Some of these things still happens and might be even more noticeable if you come from Italy, where dogs are asked to run as much, as fast and as wide as they can (the pure, the fool...) and dogs usually back naturally but, our trials have other faults and he admits that, maybe, a British judge attending one of our trials, on a particular unlucky day, would not be impressed by what we show

him. Giulio Colombo, however, was skilled enough to see recognize good things at British trials, he admits, for instance, having seen some dogs he really liked. Yes, he says some dogs were “low quality”, but equally admits others were outstanding. I share his opinion: some British dogs lack of class, style and pace to compete successfully here but others... are absolutely not inferior to some Made in Italy dogs. I really, really liked some dogs I saw in Britain, and I am sure they would make our judges smile. Colombo mentions **Seguntium Niblick**, Pointer owned Mr. J. Alun Roberts who got first prize in All Aged Stake; **Scotney Gary**, Pointer owned by Mr. Arthur Rank, second prize; **Scotney Solitaire**, Pointer owned by Mr. Arthur Rank, third prize; **Sulhamstead Basil d'Or** Irish Setter, fourth prize; **Ch. Downsmans Bracken**, English Setter, fifth prize; **Sulhamstead Nina d'Or**, Irish Setter owned by Mrs. Nagle e Miss M. Clarcks and **Flashaway Eve**, English Setter owned by Col. A. S. Dalding. I think he really liked the Flashaway Eve as he describes him as very avid, stylish and very a typical low set gallop, he thinks he has all the features a dog needs to become a FT. Ch. He concludes with a note on **Dero 4° del Trasimeno** who was exported to the UK and is ones of the ancestors of **Scotney Gary** (and of some American dogs) and **Blakfield Gide** stepsister of the Italian **Fast** and **Galf di S. Patrick**. Author tanks those who made his experience possible: **Mr. and Mrs Bank, Lady Auckland, Mr. Buckley, Mr. Binney, Mr. and Mrs. Mac Donald Daly, Mr. and Mrs. William Wiley, Mr. Lovel Clifford**



So which are the key points for contemporary readers? Giulio Colombo outlines the Setter and Pointer history and explains why these dogs should work in a given manner. It is a matter of grounds and of birds: before trials ever existed, these dogs were hunting dogs and had to work all day long for the

hunter who wanted to go home with a bag filled with birds. Setters and Pointers were tested in difficult and real hunting situations and it soon became clear which behaviours and attitudes were useful and which were not. The most sought after traits and behaviours were later coded and field trials were born, not viceversa. Dogs used to be tested during real shooting days and then, the best of them, were trialed. Things were like this during the early Pointer and Setter days and, in my opinion, they should not have changed. Nowadays, there are, at least in Italy, FT.Ch. who have never been shot over and, most of all, are trained, handled or owned by people who had never hunted, and never hunted on grounds and birds suitable for these breeds. People therefore do not understand some of field trial rules, nor how the dogs should behave but they consider themselves "experts". Colombo mentions steadiness to flush and the commands **down** and **drop**, some of the most misunderstood things in my country. People think (and probably thought, already in 1956), that these commands are taught "just to show off". On the contrary they can make shooting safer (a steady dog is not likely to be shot) and the drop and the down are extremely useful on open grounds. I am not sure whether Colombo attended grouse trials and, if so, how abundant grouse were but I took me only a couple of minutes to realize the importance of these teachings on a grouse moor. He then remembers why Setters and Pointers are supposed to work in a brace and to quarter in "good" wind while crossing their paths. Dogs should work in a brace to better explore the waste ground and, in doing so, they should work together, in harmony, like a team. Teamwork is very important, yet a dog must work independently from his brace mate and, at the same time, support his job and honour his points, these things shall be written in the genes. Dogs shall also be easy to handle so that they could be handled silently (not to



disturb the quarry too much) and always be willing to cooperate with the handler. I don't think I ever read these last two recommendations on any modern books on Setters and Pointers, have these traits lost importance?

I think you can now understand why I find Giulio Colombo's report on Sutton Scotney intriguing and fascinating, but there is more, something personal: like the author, I had the privilege to watch and to take part in British trials, [they mean a lot to me](#), I came back as a different "dog person" and they made me have a "different dog".

[You can read more on British trials here.](#)

Break it Down- by Tok Mostert

There is no doubt that seeing a well trained dog doing everything right is a pure delight to owner/handler or observer, not to mention a judge. The seamless way they cut up a field missing no ground, the sudden stop and lock up on point, the flush on command, the stop, the marking of the fallen bird, the glance for permission to retrieve, the retrieve and the delivery all flowing like a gentle mountain stream over smooth rock. Pure dog poetry in motion!

What few understand is how exactly you get a dog to that level. Many fail due to their lack of experience, the experienced fail due to their lack of adapting. There is nothing more heartbreaking to watch than a handler train one dog after another in the same way, and making the same mistakes, dog after dog. For the novice it is a minefield of advice and methods, some good some totally disastrous!! Some novices will seek advice from the old dog hands, other will shun all help.

I have my own way of training a dog, most of it is old school, some of it is purely my way of doing things, I still do things wrong, but I learn from that pretty quickly when I fail my dog. Yes, I fail my dog, not the dog fails me. If I have not trained or exposed my dog to certain things, I am failing my dog, but that is another topic.



Getting back to watching a dog do everything right. To get to that level a good handler/trainer would have broken down every single step in the opening scenario and then he would have also compartmentalized the individual steps into single separate training sessions. Don't get it?

The retrieve can be broken down as follows:

1. Dog sitting steady by your side
2. Dog looks at you when you whisper his name or click your tongue
3. Dog takes dummy, or bird, from your hand on command, does not chew or play
4. Dog stays sitting as you walk away, does not drop the bird or dummy
5. Dog comes straight in when called, still holding the dummy
 - 5.1 Dog does not keep circling you with dummy or bird
 - 5.2 Dog does not drop the bird/dummy at your feet
 - 5.3 Dog sits calmly with dummy in his mouth until you give him the deliver command
6. Dog holds steady on a cast, waits for command
7. Dog does not lift on the cast
8. Dog marks cast

9. Dog does not move when you walk and pick up dummy or bird
10. Dog does not move when you place multiple dummies out
11. Dog does not switch dummies/birds when they are placed together

This gives you a general outline of how small the different steps can be broken down into. It is the same for every single thing you train. The point, the flush, the way the dog works a field, everything. I have said times before, sit down and decide what signals you will use, whistle, hand or verbal, train them into yourself long before you try and teach them to the dog, this is crucial!

Do not be in a hurry to weave this all together into your invisible leash. Once the dog can 100% of the time complete these micro exercises you can start putting 2 together, then 3 and so on. This is the only way to forge a unbreakable invisible leash. Few dogs fall apart during trials, most of them fall apart under high volume high pressure shoots and hunts, this is exactly the time you can least afford it or correct it.

Many people wait for the season to open so they can let their dogs run on field and find birds, this is foolish when you can train so many other aspects before the field season opens.

Keep it fun, keep it focused!

Are you interested in gundogs? [Check out the Gundog Research Project!](#)

Tok Mostert, a Professional Hunter from South Africa, now living in Sweden, is sharing his writings on dog training with us. [You can start reading them from Part 1 here.](#)

We are Losing Legendary Methods (Obedience and Discipline) – By T. Mostert

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We are Losing Legendary Methods (Obedience and Discipline) – By T. Mostert

This is purely my opinion, what I believe and have experienced, there are many other opinions and beliefs when it comes to training obedience. Clickers, treats, positive conditioning, e-collars, positive – negative training, in the end there are as many methods as there are dog breeds. Everyone sells their method as the gospel, as the only way to train a dog. Then you have the other side of the coin where trainers believe the dog should be as raw as possible, sticking close to his instinct and breeding as possible, with little human interference.

Now I can tell you that the best bird finding dog I have ever seen is a English Pointer that had non existing obedience, the only time the dog would stand still was when pointing, he was wild!

Blood trackers do not care if the dog pulls or pushes, as long as he is tracking and finding game, no recall or stop signals are needed because the dog is restrained all the time.

Unfortunately, if you have a HPR dog and you will use it in all the disciplines he was bred for, you cannot afford to have little, or no obedience. You may get away with it competing in

young dog classes, but you will never, I repeat, never make it to the top 10% of elite dogs without proper obedience. To be at the top of every discipline consistently, you need a dog to listen and obey commands. To have a dog hunt in areas with main roads and rail tracks, you need obedience; to ensure your dog does not go after game you may not hunt, you need obedience and discipline. In short if nothing else to keep your dog from getting hurt or killed you need obedience.



As said before, I spent many, many, hours with Jeppe Stridh and I believe in his methods. My own conclusions run parallel to his training and the 95% – 5% rule (praise- correction ratio) is what I stick to, in all my training, not just obedience. As Jeppe clearly states, dogs see a red or green light, there is no amber warning light for them, it is yes or no, keep it simple. A leash is a restraint, when you start training a leash is a great tool but, unless the dog learns that you are a mental and physical leash right out to beyond where the dog can see, you will never have full control. Your " presence" needs to extend to the limit of where you are willing to let the dog go, this is also the limit at where you should work the dog! If you cannot control the dog at 20 meters off leash why, why try and control it at 300 meters? You are simply allowing the dog to say fuck you!

Mistakes, or inappropriate behaviour, shall be corrected

immediately and swiftly, is everything. Do not hang over the dog or extend the corrections, it places more pressure on them and has more negative effect than correction attributes. Also once the correction is done, give the dog space, take a step sideways away from the dog. He will close that gap up by himself, which is exactly what you want! Always, always be friendly with the dog right after any corrections, always!

I have a problem and I have had it for a while, I am working on it and I try to keep it in mind everyday. I want to keep touching Flake to reassure her and calm her down, it is wrong. Your voice ,attitude and general body language should be enough to do all of these things, save the touching and stroking for when you are not training (you are always training, I know).

Flake was a unsure puppy and needed more encouragement than most other dogs. Lucky we got over that quickly, but the touching habit has not been broken by me. A dog is low, or insecure, when his tail is tucked, ears and whole demeanor are low, won't look you in the eyes, keeps exposing his stomach to you and follows behind you. Then you need to be extremely careful and give him all the support you can. Opposed to that, is the strong bullhead dog that needs progressively harder correction until they toe the line.

It is all a balance, fine adjustments in voice, movements and commands both positive and negative should be made all the time, until you find what is best for you and your dog. Repeated useless corrections are only going to make things harder for both you and the dog. When the dog does something right, praise him immediately and excessively, once he understands, tone the praise down bit by bit until a simple click of the your tongue is all the praise the dog needs, I don't even do that anymore a simple nod, and silent good dog

is all she needs to acknowledge me



I get asked how often I train discipline and obedience My answer is always the same ,I don not train it I live it, it never stops. Feed the dog, sit, stay, okay you can eat now. Door open dog still waits for a command to indicate it's okay to go out, finished outside door still open, dog sits and waits for my command to say she can come in. Open her crate in the back of the car, she waits for a command to get in, same for when she gets out. It is a never ending process. Why? The dog keeps evolving, new experiences, new places,new faces and hormones as they age, but they need to understand the same rules always apply.

Now for a crucial part that relates directly to field work and obedience. It is a contradiction, but a vital part of turning a well trained HPR into a bird machine! You cannot have a good field dog if you have too much discipline! The two do not go hand in hand! It is no use having a remote operated dog that will only do what you tell it to do on a field, for a dog to find birds it has to rely on its senses and experience, not on the handler. Here and only here do you need to back off on the obedience! Your dog needs freedom to make the correct choices and gain experience.

Example 1:

Trainer and dog arrive at a field test. Dog has no leash from the moment he gets let out of the vechile. Trainer and dog follow after the pairs being released, dog is never more than a arm length away from the trainer, never. Time comes for the pair to run their beat on the field. Dog is released/sent out

to work the field, runs left 50 meters, switches, runs right 50 meters switches, goes out 30 meters, cuts back to pass a meter from the trainer. This continues for 5 minutes, until the dog is maybe 70 meters deep and 50 meters wide, dog stops looks back at the trainer and waits for a command. Same scenario plays out the whole 15 minute beat, often accompanied by the trainer blowing on the whistle every minute. This dog is focused on getting it right, it is getting it all wrong!

Example 2:

Trainer arrives at a field test, gets out of the vehicle with a leash, is forcing the door open, but also blocking it at the same time until he can slip the leash on the dog. From there he is a weight being dragged after the dog until he and his dog have a beat to run. Leash off dog runs up down, left right finds a hare and 4 hours later the retainer still has not managed to get hold of the dog. This despite blowing himself blue in the face for at least 2 hours on a whistle that has never worked on the dog.

They may be two extreme examples, but they are real examples of both too much and too little obedience and both end the same way, no birds no score.

There is so much more I want to write on this topic, but it is better to find a Legend and train with him.

While testing dogs may be hard, hunting with them is going to multiply any lack of or excess of obedience. No matter how much of a simulation you do while training, it is nothing compared to the real thing. I have picked up more mistakes under high pressure hunting situations than I ever will simply training, if your HPR is just going to do the circuit of trails you have it easy. If however you are going to use the true potential of the dog and take yourself and your HPR to the limit of your and their abilities, make sure you have a solid foundation in obedience and discipline. *You cannot let*

go something you never had, you can only let something go if you have it, simple rule for obedience and discipline.

[More on fieldwork here.](#)

Entering a trial Italy vs UK part II: UK

After discussing Italy [here](#), what about the [United Kingdom](#)? How do you enter a trial? First of all, if you do not live in the UK and your dog is not registered with their Kennel Club, you have to go through the Kennel Club website and fill out an application form to get an ATC (Authorization to Compete) number. You can choose between two options: getting an ATC number alone; getting an ATC number and register your dog microchip number at [Petlog](#). This second option is more expensive, but worth: if your dog get lost, having his microchip been registered in the Petlog database, would make a reunion easier. Once you have an ATC number, you can formally enter the dog in trials. Warning: the whole procedure might take up to three weeks.

I do not know how things work for HPRs (Continental Pointing Dogs, but trials for British Pointing Breeds take place only during specific times of the year. There are two weeks on grouse in March; one week on partridge in April; almost a month on grouse (mid July/mid August) and, finally one more week on partridge in September. The total number of trials is therefore extremely limited, if compared to the number of trials taking place in Italy during a year (hundreds!) and makes getting a run quite complicated. With the calendar at hand, you have to find the contacts of the club organizing

each trial, get a specific entry form, fill it out and return it to the club secretary before the deadline, together with the entry fees. The most complicated thing, for those abroad, is paying the fees in advance. All the clubs accept cheques but it is impossible to send a cheque in sterling from abroad, which makes things complicated for a foreigner. Some clubs accept foreigners to wire money through a bank, others are ok with you paying at the venue...



In the form you have to fill out you have to write the dog's name and date of birth; his/her parents names; the breeder, the owner and the handler names and so on. You should not forget the breed and whether he has already gained any awards in British trials as this would allow him to enter the Open stake more easily. British trials have three option when it comes to stakes: Puppy; Novice and Open. Puppy Stakes are for dogs younger than 2 years who had never qualified; Novice Stake is for dogs of every age who have never won a 1st or 2nd place in a Novice Stake (or Puppy Stake) and Open Stakes are for those who did! To become a Field Trial Champion, a dog must win two Open Stakes. Field trial rules remain the same regardless of the stake, but judges can be "kinder" towards dogs who run in Puppy and Novice Stakes. Is it difficult for a foreign dog to enter a trial and, more specifically, run in an Open Stake? I think it depends on the trial and on the time of the year: whilst Open Stakes are Open to all dogs, the dogs who had qualified 1st or 2nd in Novice and Puppy Stakes are allowed to run only in Open, hence are given priority. Trials run in Northern Scotland are usually less crowded that those run in England and, I was told, March Trials are less popular.

Are Puppy and Novice Stakes easier to get in? My experience is extremely limited, but I think they are. What we shall remember is that stakes usually accommodate a maximum of 40 dogs (and each trial has ONLY one stake, not three, four or more like in Italy), and the extra dogs become “reserves” (= they are placed on a waiting list). Reserves that cannot get a run will get their money back. Being member of the club organizing the trial and having had placements in the past proved more chances to get a run.

Still curious about British trials? Check the section A Month on the Moor or [click here](#).

Finding Diamonds in the Marsh: Snipe Field Trials

I have a thing for snipe and I cannot help it. Yes, I do love grouse probably more, but snipe is not too bad and help me to cope with absence of the first one. Snipe and I are very old and very good friends: we met, by chance, in 2004, the same year I got my first shooting license. To make the long story short, books and hunters' tales made me aware of snipe existence, but I had never spotted any of these tiny waders until Spina, an English Setter, pointed one. I was so fascinated by her work that I decided I liked snipe. Not all dogs point snipe, not all dogs like them: snipe live in uncomfortable places, such as rice paddies and marshes. More specifically, local snipe live in rice paddies inundated by water, the muddier the better. It is not easy to run on these grounds and weather conditions tend to be equally unfriendly to dogs. Autumn and winter here are notorious for fog, rain, dampness and absence of wind. A dog must really like snipe to

go looking for them and he also needs to possess great stamina and prey drive: snipe are scarce and the dog is likely to end up running for hours on “empty” and unfriendly grounds. Furthermore, if the dog is lucky enough to find one, the bird might still be able to outsmart the mammal and fly away before the four legged creature has a chance to point.



Cuore

Snipe are nervous, fast, light and incredibly tricky creatures but, needless to say, a few brave handlers dare to enter their dogs in snipe field trials. Trials that, given the bird itself, are different to from any other trials. They are believed to be for “specialists” only. Rules and judging standards make them special, British Pointing dogs, for instance, run “solo”, without a bracemate, something which is not normally allowed. Why do they run alone? Because, otherwise, it will be even more unlikely to work a bird properly. Judges want the dogs to be fast and run wide while exactly the where the birds are. They speak of “snipe sense”: the dog is supposed to quarter nicely in the wind and find a bird effortlessly during his 15 minutes run. This is not easy: dogs who trot around acting suspicious and proving unable to discern between scent and snipe, hence exhibiting many false points, are not appreciated. The dog must look decisive, run, locate and point, there is not usually any roading, due to snipe being extremely eager to fly, sometimes too much. You can’t have two dogs running at full speed in the same rice paddy, snipe, if present, would explode like landmines! Also,

you can't whistle much, you can't talk, you have to be extremely careful when closing your car's door, make too much noise and you will end up running on snipe ghosts.... Oh... I was forgetting jack snipe, a critter meant to further complicate things.

What I just wrote is clearly enough to re-direct handlers somewhere else, provided they are wise. I have always considered snipe trials to be the Olympus and dreamt about them like normal women dream about holidays on a tropical island. I like snipe, Briony likes snipe, we live in (ghost) snipe land, yet my autumn trial plans were about ordinary birds, such as pheasant and partridge. My smart planning, however, lasted until my stake at "normal" trial was suddenly cancelled, two days before it was supposed to take place.

Disappointed, I went online to check for other nearby trials taking place during that weekend, snipe were the only option. I picked up the phone and spoke directly to the [Snipe Club](#) (yes we have a snipe club!) president who referred me to the secretary. Surprise! I knew the secretary well: he entered me in his trial right away.



Blus

On the morning of the trial, when I reached the venue, I felt quite intimidated. Everybody looked tremendously professional: there were snipe stickers and snipe patches everywhere. People were wearing waders and everybody was, or at least professionally pretended to be, professional. Once on the ground things continued to be the same: people blew talcum

powder in every directions to assess the wind (there was no wind indeed & I had no talcum powder); people were being picky about the grounds and so on. The Snipe Club asked me to take pictures for them, which allowed me to follow the stake closely. What I saw during that trial did not impress me: some dogs (including mine) had to be casted on empty and dry grounds, others had more luck and got a run on wet paddies with plenty of snipe but could not handle them properly. We had blank points, dogs bumping into birds, dogs chasing and so on. But, while dogwork did not fascinate me, people did: everybody was kind, supportive and friendly. Well, they became like this after they had studied me for a couple of hours: they initially thought I was there "just" to take pictures and they could not match me with the dog. Those men thought the dog was there "just" to watch and that she was too pretty and too white to compete. When they finally accepted the fact that she was going to run... they expected someone else (male) to handle her. I do not know where the supposed male could have been located, as my car contained no human beings besides me, it might be they though he was going to arrive just in time for her run. Seeing me walking straight into the trialing ground with the dog on lead, thus signalling I was the handler, generated quite a silence and put us under unwanted spotlights. We had an awful ground: stream on the left, railway in front, tractor on the right and no water under the stubble. Briony worked nicely in the wind and explored the ground with method, but unfortunately there were no snipe waiting for her. Her good behaviour, nevertheless, erased suspicions: in the beholders' eyes I suddenly became a good handler, silence ceased and people stepped towards me to congratulate and ask questions. It was fun! Someone asked if I trained her by myself; which was her bloodline; whether I intended to continue trialing her and so on: good feelings.



Us

At the end of the day, I was confused and unsure whether to continue trialling on snipe or not but, by the end of the week, I had made my mind up and Mauro, the secretary, as promised, had saved a place for me. This time, at the venue, I had several new “friends” who happily welcomed me and made me feel part of the pack or, rather, more like their family pet. The snipe club itself self decided to adopt me as their “photographer” and it became a routine, for the handlers, trying to look good in pictures. I ended up taking 5 of the 10 (?) field trials that compose the autumn snipe trial circuit, and this is what happened. Out of five trials Briony had the occasion to properly work snipe only twice: on the first occasion, she scented it and started roading along the scent but, in the same instant she was about to stop and point, the snipe flew by itself so we were out. The second time, instead, she made a mistake and she missed the bird. We did not meet any other snipe until the last trial, which was run in a monsoon like setting that forced snipe to be light and fly by themselves miles ahead of dogs. I was forgetting about trial number four in which she pointed a pheasant: it was the only bird she could find, yet it was not a valid point. The dog who ran after her was equally unlucky, finding the only hare every spotted in that county! Me & Briony did not have a chance to be graded during those five trials, but all the judges encouraged us to keep trialling (or I would have saved my money!) and she was once mentioned – a little achievement for us – during the award giving ceremony: judges here are allowed

to talk about that nice dog who was doing so well but could not be graded due to bad luck, or to minor mistakes.



Him!!! (Oldrado)

On the average, during a trial, only 20% of the dogs had a chance to meet snipe, this might not sound fair but snipe cannot be “planted” and you have to deal with the scarce birds you have. Or, maybe, you can try to purchase a huge amount of luck in advance. In my case, it never seemed to fit in the shopping cart but, I have to admit, that my fellow competitors have often behaved like gentlemen, trying to provide me with promising grounds and some little extra hints. It is usually easier to find snipe if you know the grounds, yet they can still surprise you!

So, are snipe trials as difficult as they are rumored to be? I think so: birds are scarce, wary (& wiry) and deeply influenced by weather conditions. Snipe are diamonds and, like diamonds, are little and not easy to find, but they are shining, so if you are careful enough you might find one! We ran the first trial on a damp, windless warm day; the subsequent ones were all run in misty and windless cold mornings, all but for the last one during which we finally had some wind... accompanied by a torrential rain! Pointing snipe without wind is not easy, and these conditions also hardened the judge's job as dark skies and mist made more difficult to see everything and correctly discern between mistakes made on snipe (which lead to an elimination) and on jack snipe (the dog can miss them). What about the handlers? As it happens in

other trials, you get all sort of handlers: some had perfectly trained dogs and some dogs had wilder specimen who liked to chase, bump into birds and run away, tendencies that sometimes prevented them to be graded but, did I see any good dogs? Yes, I think so, and I must admit that, even if English Setters were the most represented breed, I also saw good dogs who were not English Setters! Among them I have to mention a couple of Irish Setters (they were not graded), a flashy pointer (he was not graded either) and a wonderful Gordon Setter: I am hardly enthusiastic about Gordons but this one was truly impressive! So... am I going to be back in spring? Maybe...

Entering a trial: Italy vs UK. Part I: Italy

It seems easy but it is not! Let's start from Italy.

How can you enter a trial in Italy? Well... You first have to find the trial. Trials are held almost daily in different part of the country, all year round but for spring and early summer (during this period there are still some trials on quail). To further complicate things, the ENCI (Italian Kennel Club) allows some Italian trials to be run abroad, in places such as Serbia, Poland and more. Anyway, let's say you want to stick to Italy, all you have to do is go to the ENCI website and click on the section [Manifestazioni e Eventi](#), pick a month and choose which kind of trial you are interested in. Grande Cerca (Grand Quete)? Caccia a Starne (Grey partridge)? Classica o attitudinale a quaglie (different kind of trials on quail)? Selvaggina Naturale (wild birds)? Let's say you'd go for Selvaggina Naturale, which are the most popular trials, which kind of birds do you want your dog to be graded on? Pheasant,

partridge (red legged and grey) suit you, or do you want anything more specific such as woodcock, snipe or mountain birds? Once you have found something you like, click on it to get the details of those organizing and let the fun begin!



Pizza

Sleeping

Bag

<https://www.etsy.com/listing/96236038/plain-slice-of-pizza-sleeping-bag>

You call the number you have found: none answers because that office is supposed to be open only from 5 to 7 Pm on Thursday (even days), and on 10-11 Am on Friday (odd days). You then try the second listed number, just in case, and nothing happens, again. Before giving up, you send an e-mail but, two days later, you realize you have not got any answers. At this point you begin worrying and decide you start tracking "the secretary" using informal channels, aka through common acquaintances. Once you obtain a cell phone number, and manage to speak to a human voice, he – the voice- (keep in mind all those involved with pointing dog trials in Italy are men) will usually answer that it is ok, you can enter the dog and he will check your e-mail right away. Sometimes the voice will drop you a line to ask you if you are REALLY sure you want to own & handle the dog at the same time, as normally pointing dogs are handled by professional trainers at trials. Most often, however, your email will remain unanswered. There are times you are not even given a number, the acquaintance just tells you to keep calm and that he will enter the dog for you...

When the morning of the trial comes, therefore, you are not going to be sure whether you are expected to show up or not. In such a world of uncertainty, however, nobody seems to be interested in your money, entering a trial usually costs 30 Euros, but I have never been asked to send any money in advance. Everybody is expected to pay in cash at the venue. Why this policy? I do not know exactly but, given the fact you are often allowed enter a trial until the day before it takes place, there would be simply no time to collect the money in advance. Also, most of the competitors are not familiar with computers and credit cards and our postal service is awful: none would send any banknotes in the mail and banks take commissions on cheques. Together with the money, you are

supposed to bring with you the dog's vaccination booklet stating he has been vaccinated against rabies; documents related to his microchip and the "libretto delle qualifiche" (results booklet). The "libretto delle qualifiche" is a special diary in which all the results obtained by the dog are written, show after show and trial after trial: it is compulsory for Italian owned dogs, foreigners can do without. Microchipping is compulsory and the dog's identity might be checked at the end of the trial, a tattoo can be accepted for foreign dogs.

During trials, British pointing dogs are expected to run with a brace mate, snipe trials and some woodcock and mountain trials (plus the Puppy Derby) are the only exception. HPRs (continental pointing dogs), instead, run alone. Each trial is made up of multiple Open Stakes, the number of the stakes is decided upon the number of the dog entered, there are usually about 12 braces in a stake. It is perfectly normal to have 3 or 4 Open Stakes running simultaneously. Stakes for younger dogs or for females only (Oaks) are very rare, but can take place sometimes, Novice stakes do not exist. Normally CAC trials are judged by one judge, while trials in which a CACIT is awarded require two judges. Each dog is expected to run for 15 minutes (if he does not make any eliminating mistakes...) and can be asked to have a second round, but a second round is not compulsory to be graded. Mistakes made during the first minute of the run are not taken into account.



Painting by Roberto Noguel

When it comes to trials, great flexibility is required: you cannot enter a trial with great advance because dates might be changed, for different reasons: sometimes local governments postpone, or deny, the authorization to run on public grounds; some other times the farmer “forgets” to cut the crops, or maybe snow and floods force to cancel an event. This is why you should check the ENCI website constantly.... I sadly have to admit that in Italy it is almost impossible to program anything (not just trials) with great advance, because something MIGHT happen and is likely to happen. It is not unusual for an event date to change, it keeps happening with my university exams with dates changing last minute; trains are never on time and sometimes they never show up and workers can go on strike at any moment. While I do not like this lifestyle, I try to see the good in the bad, Italians are often capable to invent last minute solutions and make everybody happy.

Ps. Things might sound a little vague and confusing but people are usually very welcoming and helpful. They really do their best to help novices and foreigners.

The Missing Link: the Moor

Warning, this is a hamster article. What???

A hamster article is one of those articles that starts running into the writers's mind, exactly as a hamster would do on its wheel. Hamster articles want to be told and can get impatient. My hamster has been running for more than a month, it is time to make it happy. The little critter wants me to write about the Missing Link, or rather, about the Moor. Those who know me personally, or have been in touch with me for a while, have

probably already realized that I am a little weird, and that I am completely at ease with this trait. But, sometimes, I do feel out of place or as if something was missing.

Speaking of English Setters, which I am deeply devoted to, a puzzle piece was missing, it took me 16 years since my first setter to find it. Most weird adults had been weird children, I am not exception: as toddler, I absolutely refused milk and my feeding bottle used to contain tea, no wonder I could not sleep. When I was four, the kindergarten teachers called my parents, they were alarmed because I used too much purple and violet in my drawings. My parents could not give any rational explanations, nor I can't being still known by the paint shop as the lady who orders custom made mauve/heather for her walls. At five, I used to have tea and potato pancakes for breakfast, normal Italian children were fed coffee-latte with biscuits. I think it was also the time I was given a booklet on Queen Elizabeth 25th Silver Jubilee, I kept it like a treasure and it is still on my bookshelf. One year later, I joined an extra-curricular English language class, and discovered through my textbook, that British houses for sale have bathtubs full of giant spiders. And, finally, at ten, I was absolutely convinced that I "needed" a working English Setter, my parents not so.



Walls...and more!

Years later, I eventually got one and I began shooting over pointing dogs and attending field trials. Something, however, was missing. I enjoyed my time in the countryside, I kept reading, asking and following judges and more experienced hunters to learn more, but something I could not define was still missing. All that I knew was that I loved some shooting grounds more than others. I could mention Villa Alta in Ruino; Costa del Vento and Costa Pelata in Montalto – all of them in the Apennines and all of them, ironically – I would have discovered later – pretty moor-like. Other places were simply dull. Italians believe British pointing dogs need space, and justify “grand quete” and its extremes, on the premise that these dogs were born for the moors. My fellow countrymen think that is perfectly fine for an English Setter to run from a valley to another (while being tracked with a GPS collar) because it was created to run on moors. Pointers are allowed to run even wider, two or three valleys might be fine. I did not buy into this theory entirely, but I managed to keep my thoughts for myself. Maybe they were right but, to me, it was like they were trying to fit a foot in the wrong shoe.



Costa del Vento in February

Setters running in wide open plains, setters used in woods, or among briars and bushes, were doing well, proving to be a quite versatile and adaptable breed but, my gut feelings kept telling me something was still out of place. I had old pictures of setters on the moor in my books and on my walls, they were black and white pictures and I could not figure out the colours. In 2008, at the CLA Gamefair, I purchased the GWT (Gamekeepers Welfare Trust) Ladies & Gamekeepers Calendar: the moor was shining in purple! It was not just the heather: the sky and the light were coming in different shades of violet, the whole atmosphere was purple! It was so surreal, so magic! I thought the colours had been recreated using Photoshop. I can be pretty naïve sometimes!

In 2015 went on a moor for the first time and everything felt incredibly familiar and normal. The dogs running on the moor were fitting perfectly in the picture: grouse, heather and lavender skies seemed to have been tailored for them. As soon

as I left the moor, I missed it: I felt I had to go back, live it, understand it. One year later, those purple skies were watching me from above, I was smiling back at them. I spent a month among heather, among grouse, among British pointing dogs: everything fell into place, my English Setter, who was there, can confirm. Setters belonged to the moor, or viceversa; grouse suited the dogs perfectly; heather supported their job and weather was great! Well, weather on the moor is hardly great, if we evaluate it according to human standards, but if you are a dog that is a great weather! It is cold enough, windy enough, wet enough. I got so used to being blown away by the wind that I seriously miss it!

I was (and I am) so in love with the moor that I enthusiastically shared pictures with my Italian friends whose mixed reactions surprised me. One, in particular, noticed that the moors are lacking of trees, they are barren he stated. I never noticed there are no trees, this probably happened because I do not consider moors to be barren. On the contrary, they are full of wonderful gifts, you just have to be sensitive enough to recognize them. I do not need woods, woodcock do not bewitch me: Italians love shooting woodcock over English Setters, they are fascinating birds, but I cannot honestly claim I love them. Grouse are different and they are great teachers, both challenging and patient, I think they are probably one of the best birds for training pointing dogs. Also, I do not consider woods to be the ideal ground for an ES: trees and leaves prevent you from seeing the dog work, heather instead, while hiding grouse, leaves the dog under the spotlights.



Dogs, purple heather, lavender skies

The moor is a sacred space and only well behaved dogs are welcome: moors are for training, trialling and shooting. Up to now I have experienced only the first [two activities](#) and I will keep writing on them, what I can say, briefly, is that trialling in the UK is different. I am not here to claim it is better (or worse) and I cannot find a proper word to define my feelings towards it, but, in its being different it seems incredibly normal to me and... it proved me right! Moor, grouse & trials teach the dogs to range wide but “properly wide” which differs from “nonsense wide”. The ground openness might be tempting, but a smart pointing dog, trained the British way, will run as wide as it would be allowed to do during a traditional – GPS free -shooting day. Being shooting the first gundog related activity I got involved in, I cannot but agree. Maybe one day I will witness grouse shooting, this will put the finishing touches to the painting: English Setter, purple heather, gunpowder smell and lavender skies.

Still curious about British trials? Check the section [A Month](#)

on the Moor or [click here](#).